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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 000927

SIPDIS

FOR NEA/ARPI

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KWMN](#) [PGOV](#) [KU](#) [WOMEN](#) [POLITICAL](#) [RIGHTS](#)

SUBJECT: SPEAKER SAYS NATIONAL ASSEMBLY COULD GO EITHER WAY
ON WOMEN'S VOTE

REF: A. KUWAIT 796

[B](#). KUWAIT 405

[C](#). 99 KUWAIT 7303

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) During a brief exchange at a social event on March 5, National Assembly Speaker Jassem Al-Khorafi told Ambassador that the Assembly vote on women's political rights would either pass or fail by one or two votes. The Speaker said that the government could decide to handle the issue through two other maneuvers, but he continues to believe a National Assembly vote would be the best way to make the decision.

[1](#)2. (C) Al-Khorafi's second best option would be for the government to dissolve the parliament and grant women immediate rights to vote and hold office through Amiri decree. Then the next Assembly would be partially elected by women voters. (Note: The previous attempt to grant women's suffrage by decree in 1999, issued when the Assembly was in recess, proved divisive and fell short by two votes when the Assembly reconvened. Critics blamed the government for failing to encourage undecided MPs to support the effort. Interestingly, Al-Khorafi was one of the two dissenters. In the option Al-Khorafi is raising, the decree would only take effect if introduced after the current Assembly -- elected for a 4-year term in 2003 -- were dissolved. Any subsequent vote on the decree would be by an Assembly elected by women voters. End note.) Al-Khorafi said that this option is not very attractive since it calls into question the democratic credentials of the country.

[1](#)3. (C) A third option is for the government to take the matter to the constitutional court. Al-Khorafi said this was a poor option because it could be used as a precedent to call into question some of the privileges now afforded to women, or other issues such as the lack of voting rights for military personnel.

[1](#)4. (C) Finally, Al-Khorafi said that those women who will organize and be effective politically will not be the relatively secular and modern segment of the population but rather will come from the more organized and determined traditional and conservative religious groups. He said this phenomenon is already evident in elections in universities -- Islamists have led the Kuwait's Student Union for the past 25 years -- and other non-governmental organizations.

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